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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/WE, EUR/RPM AND NEA/IPA

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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [BE](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: BELGIUM TO REFUSE EXPORT LICENSES FOR ARMS TO
PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Richard Eason, reason 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (U) On February 2 the Belgian Federal government held a consultation with the Flemish, Walloon and Brussels regional authorities responsible for issuance of export licenses for arms to coordinate Belgium's policy on arms exports to "Israel and the occupied territories." Arms export licenses are a competency of the regions under Belgian law, although the regions consult with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a practical matter. On February 11, Poloff discussed the results of the meeting with Werner Bauwens, Director of the Non-Proliferation and Export Controls Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Bauwens was not willing to talk freely about the new policy, but referred Poloff to a statement issued by the MFA on February 9.

¶2. (U) That statement says:

Begin text:

"At the initiative of Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, a consultation on the policy of arms exports to Israel and the occupied territories was organized with Belgium's three regions. Such consultations are provided for in the cooperation agreement on arms exports. (Note: this is an agreement between the federal government and the regions.)

"During that consultation, the following was agreed with the respective regional governments:
-- 'not to issue any arms export licence that would shore up the military capabilities of the forces present there.'
-- Furthermore, in view of the recent, delicate cease-fire on the ground, the parties to the consultations stressed the 'need for the greatest vigilance when awarding licenses destined for Israel and the occupied territories'.
-- Finally, it was agreed that 'Belgium, including its federate entities, wishes to act in line with a common European position in which its European partners' policy on awarding or refusing licences looms large. To this end, Belgium will be holding talks with its partners in the Council Working Group on Conventional Arms (COARM)'. (Note: reference is to the European Council.)

"It is true that the meaning of the term 'arms export' is very broadly defined in Belgium. For instance exports may be temporary or involve cooperation in space programmes that appear as 'arms exports' in the official statistics but do not fall under the associated regulations.

"Minister De Gucht believes that the agreement reached with the Regions is extremely important: "It sends out a strong signal to all the parties involved in the conflict in the Middle East, he said."

End text.

13. (C) Post assesses that the MFA's mention of temporary exports and space programs is intended to downplay the actual effect of the new policy. Reports in the Israeli press have said that Belgium exports five million dollars in small arms to Israel annually. The MFA seems to be saying that the published export figures include many items that are not destined for the Israeli army, such as those which are re-exported or used in space programs. By its own terms, the policy is in effect now and is not time-limited, but logically it should apply so long as the conflict is in a critical stage, or threatens to return to a critical stage. We expect that any Belgian arms exports to Israel could easily be replaced by other foreign sources of arms or domestic manufactures.

14. (U) Israeli newspaper headlines suggest that the Belgian policy is motivated by Israel's use of "child soldiers", who are actually 17 year old IDF conscripts. This idea in fact originated in a report purportedly published by a think tank identified as the "European Institute for Research on Peace and Security", not the Belgian government. The GOB action is based exclusively on Foreign Minister De Gucht's often-expressed dismay at Israeli actions in Gaza.

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